WASHINGTON
HIGHER
EDUCATION
COORDINATING BOARD

November 2006

DRAFT Assessment of the Higher Education Needs of Snohomish, Island, and Skagit Counties (SIS)

Introduction and Acknowledgements

This report contains the Higher Education Coordinating Board's (HECB) assessment of the higher education needs in Snohomish, Skagit, and Island Counties, and its recommendations to the legislature regarding those needs. The HECB report is provided in response to a legislative directive included in the state's 2005-2007 capital budget.

Since July 2005, numerous individuals and organizations have contributed to this report – not the least of which are the Local Advisory Committee, the institutional representatives on the Project Coordination Team, and the consulting team of NBBJ, Seattle, and MGT America, Olympia. Further, our sincere thanks go to the many others who attended or testified at public meetings, participated in surveys, or otherwise contributed to the extensive and thought-provoking work represented by this report.

The report contains two sections. Section I provides: (1) the primary conclusions and related considerations derived from the study, (2) the study recommendations, and (3) the proposed Board resolution adopting the study recommendations. Section II provides a detailed examination and discussion of the study methods and findings.

Section I: Executive Summary and Recommendations

Conclusions and Considerations

The HECB is charged, by statute, with assessing state and regional higher education needs. When considering the needs of Snohomish, Skagit, and Island Counties in isolation, our study finds that additional access to higher education in the region will be needed in the future. However, the HECB, in reviewing those needs from a statewide overview, identifies significant questions of prioritization. In that context, we believe that existing higher education resources can, if adequately funded, meet the needs for some time to come.

In meeting the immediate needs of the growing demands for higher education, the State's first priority must be to improve core funding and provide for growth at the State's existing public institutions. Logically, we must provide the financial means for the institutions to grow to full capacity before creating a new institution. The State must invest the amount of core funding

necessary to ensure that it achieves the results that are expected from higher education (i.e., citizens with the training, certificates, and degrees necessary to take their place in the State's cadre of workers that will be needed to fill the requirements of the jobs of tomorrow).

We suggest that improvements to core funding can be achieved through a noteworthy strategy proposed in the Governor's Washington Learns project. That strategy proposes to fund colleges and universities at the 60th percentile of similar institutions within the Global Challenge States within 10 years. This new strategy can be combined with practices, currently in place, to predict the impact of population growth. Further, the State should take advantage of the opportunity in the predicted short-term dip in the number of traditional college age students in order to improve the proportion of our students who attend our colleges and universities. This can only be accomplished by continuing to significantly invest in our existing public institutions of higher education.

We are sadly reminded that our State lags significantly behind the national average in providing higher education opportunities to our residents. That deficit is then shown to be lacking in meeting the needs of our State's employers who require or prefer employees with certificates or bachelors, graduate, and professional degrees.

Our existing institutions can, and will, respond to this call to serve additional students as quickly as significant funding is available. However, many of them will reach capacity limits as determined by legal agreements within the cities in which they are located (e.g., UW), geographical or environmental limits (e.g., UWB), or institutional culture and mission (e.g., TESC).

In the years to come, the State may ultimately need another four-year campus and the planning for a future campus in the SIS region should continue. Additionally, it is important to recognize and emphasize the need for the SIS area community and technical colleges to work closely with employers in the region to identify needed training and skills. To that end, while the current study provides invaluable information in addressing the questions of the type of institution that is needed and where it should be located, additional planning should continue so that state policy-makers have current and sound information to base future decisions.

In summary, core funding must be provided to build the programmatic and physical capacity of those institutions in which we are already invested. However, it is appropriate to consider and begin initial planning for the creation of a new four-year campus in the future. To ignore either, creates the risk of a smaller proportion of our residents obtaining degrees and continues the importing of even more degree holders from out of state to take the jobs and opportunities afforded by the employers of our State.

HECB Recommendations

Principal Recommendations

Following from the conclusions and considerations discussed above, the HECB recommends to the governor and Legislature that:

1. ***The State's first priority must be to improve core funding and provide for growth at the State's existing public institutions.*** Specifically, we recommend the Legislature implement a 10 year strategy to fund the colleges and universities at the 60th percentile of similar institutions within the Global Challenge States, as proposed in the Governor's Washington Learns project.

2. ***Future decisions concerning the creation of a new four-year campus in the SIS region should be considered when the existing colleges and universities have reached their maximum programmatic and physical capacity.*** This recommendation calls for the existing institutions to respond to enrollment demand from the SIS region as well as all other areas of the state, assuming that the funding strategy discussed in Recommendation 1 is implemented. This recommendation pertains to all campuses and higher education centers.

3. ***Planning for a new four-year campus in the SIS region should continue***. This recommendation recognizes the need for policy-makers to base future decisions concerning a new campus on a comprehensive plan for a new campus. The work provided by the project consultants in this phase of the study has provided valuable information about estimated future enrollment needs and alternative ways to meet those needs. More operational level planning though will be needed to fully describe to policy-makers the requirements, costs, and system impacts of creating a new campus.

Supporting Recommendations

4. Examine and research best practices and lessons learned from institutions with advanced use of technology as well as selected universities with a polytechnic focus.

5. Form a liaison committee with representatives of institutions of higher education with sufficient authority and experience to identify and work cooperatively to resolve issues of concern about regional and statewide delivery of services. Under the coordination of the Higher Education Coordinating Board, the institutions will collaborate in a joint planning effort involving enrollment studies, identification of strategic strengths in which to invest to achieve academic goals, identification of an array of innovative educational delivery systems, and strategies to overcome conflicts between and among institutions.

6. Develop a policy on enrollment management, service areas and strategic curriculum planning as a strategy to improve access and maximize the production of professional certificates, and baccalaureate and graduate degrees.

7. Review the organizational systems and the assignment of major lines and types of degrees in light of projected statewide needs. Develop a policy or legislation to implement changes in the assignment of major lines of study or types of degrees to improve access and maximize degree production.

8. Support growth in SIS area community colleges to accommodate additional students in adult basic education, workforce training, and academic transfer-oriented programs and investigate the feasibility of a future university center to serve Skagit and Island Counties and the relationship of the Everett University Center to it.

9. Investigate the feasibility of coordinated pre-admission procedures, including a common application process as one strategy to reduce front-end barriers to access.

HECB Resolution

Following from the above recommendations, the proposed HECB SIS Study Resolution is presented on the following page.

RESOLUTION NO. 06-36

WHEREAS, Section 615 of Engrossed Senate Bill 6094 directed the Higher education Coordinating Board (HECB) to undertake a study of the higher education needs of the Snohomish, Island, and Skagit (SIS) counties region, and to: (a) recommend the type of institution or institutions to be created or expanded to address those needs, (b) assess potential sites for an institution, (c) identify costs and a process for completing a master plan for higher education expansion in the study area, and (d) submit an interim report to the Legislature and governor by December 2005 and a final report and recommendations by December 1, 2006; and

WHEREAS, Section 615 of Engrossed Senate Bill 6094 also directed the HECB to appoint; a Local Advisory Committee consisting of state and local elected officials and area business and education leaders, and a technical review group composed of representatives of the higher education community; and

WHEREAS, The HECB did establish the aforementioned Local Advisory Committee and technical review group and found their participation to be of significant value and importance in the conduct of the SIS study; and

WHEREAS, The HECB did retain NBBJ, Seattle and MGT of America, Olympia to serve as the project's consultant and provide an independent and objective analysis of: (a) the higher education needs of the SIS region, (b) alternative ways of meeting those needs, (c) the comparative costs of such alternatives, and (d) the appropriate location of any new campus in the SIS region; and

WHEREAS, The project consultant has submitted its final report (dated November 2006) of findings and recommendations to the HECB; and

WHEREAS, HECB staff have reviewed the consultant's final report with the board's Education Committee, and

WHEREAS, The Education Committee has, as contained in the staff report "Assessment of the Higher Education Needs of Snohomish, Island, and Skagit Counties", dated November 2006, identified specific recommendations concerning the higher education needs of the SIS region and the role of existing institutions to accommodate state-wide enrollment demand, and

WHEREAS, The HECB has reviewed the recommendations of the Education Committee at its meeting of November 16, 2006

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, That the Higher Education Coordinating Board does concur and adopt the recommendations advanced by the Education Committee and, directs staff to transmit these recommendations to the governor and Legislature.

Adopted:

November 16, 2006

Attest:

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Gene Colin, Chair

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Jesus Hernandez, Secretary

Section II: SIS Regional Needs and Future Solutions

Background

The 2005-07 state capital budget directed the HECB to evaluate higher education and workforce training needs in Snohomish, Island, and Skagit counties and to recommend solutions to the Legislature and governor.

Specifically, the law as enacted calls for the board to:

- Assess the higher education needs in the three-county area.
- Recommend the type of institution or institutions to be created or expanded to address those needs.
- Assess potential sites for an institution.
- Identify costs and a process for completing a master plan for higher education expansion in the study area.
- Submit an interim report by December 2005 and a final report and recommendation by December 1, 2006.

The HECB project team and consultant team of NBBJ and MGT of America consulted with a 13-member local advisory committee, including state legislators, the Snohomish County executive, the mayor of the City of Everett, and two business or education leaders from each of the three counties. In addition to convening the Local Advisory Committee required by the legislation, the project team also worked with members of area institutions on a technical sounding board known as the Project Coordination Team.

Public input was received from two series of town hall meetings held in November 2005 to discuss higher education needs in the region and in May 2006 to discuss alternatives. An interim report was presented to the board at its January 2006 meeting and delivered to the Legislature as required by the authorizing legislation.

Access to higher education in north King and Snohomish, Island, and Skagit Counties has been the subject of numerous studies over the past 18 years, beginning in 1988 when the HECB recommended an upper-division branch campus be established in the Bothell-Woodinville area. Since then, a proposal to develop additional resources or further study of need in the SIS region has occurred on average every two to three years.

Statewide Context

The budget language authorizing the analysis of SIS provides specific instruction to focus on the needs of the three-county region. However, given the mission of the HECB to make decisions in the best interest of the state, representing the "broad public interest above the interests of the individual colleges and universities," the study also looked at potential solutions that would address statewide concerns. The needs of students were paramount in the examination of potential solutions.

In addition to specific study findings, the project and consultant team made use of past studies, the HECB *2004 Strategic Master Plan for Higher Education*, the HECB *State and Regional*

Needs Assessment revised in February 2006, and the study activities of Washington Learns, as well as other higher education working groups such as the Prosperity Partnership.

Strategic Master Plan for Higher Education

The 2004 strategic master plan lays out two goals for the state's system of higher education. First is to increase the number of students who earn a college degree. Second is to ensure Washington's higher education system is responsive to regional and statewide needs. The SIS study provides an analysis of the enrollment requirements and programmatic mix to serve future students from the three-county region, as well as an analysis of the type of higher education resource to best respond to the region's economic needs and opportunities.

State and Regional Needs Assessment

At the state level, the HECB analyzes higher education requirements to meet the needs of students, employers, and communities in the *State and Regional Needs Assessment Report.* This report, published for the first time in fall of 2005, identifies a substantial statewide need for growth in Washington's higher education system in order to meet increasing demand for degrees among students, and to serve communities and employers by providing an educated citizenry and a highly-trained and educated workforce that can readily adapt to changing conditions.

Staff Comment on Regional Needs

The findings of regional needs presented in the SIS study are consistent with the findings of the *State and Regional Needs Assessment*. Three regions within Washington are identified as experiencing the most significant enrollment pressure based upon population growth: Southwest Washington, King County, and the Snohomish, Island, and Skagit County region. Of these three regions, SIS is the only identified region that does not currently have a baccalaureate level institution that could accommodate the anticipated demand for higher education. The population growth in the region outpaces growth of area institutions that serve students from the region. The needs assessment data "support a close examination of the feasibility of creating a new institution to serve the area."

At the state level, demand for additional degrees in key fields such as computer science, engineering, and health care is identified in the *State and Regional Needs Assessment.* There is also a finding in both reports as well as in public testimony in the town hall meetings for continued growth in the humanities, social science, and life and physical sciences to best prepare students for work in a changing economy and continued learning.

Washington Learns and Other Higher Education Work Groups

In their report to the Washington Learns Task Force on Higher Education, the consultant group NORED also identifies a need for continued growth in our higher education. Their report compares the degree production in Washington to ten "Global Challenge" states (including Washington). The study finds that Washington is well below the national median in terms of the number of bachelor's and graduate degrees produced, confirming a position noted in numerous other studies and rankings. In addition, the report supports the need to focus additional resources

on high-demand fields similar to those outlined in the HECB needs assessment and the SIS study.

The Prosperity Partnership—a higher education working group within a coalition of more than 200 organizations implementing a regional economic strategy for central Puget Sound—also finds that increasing higher education opportunities is a key to growing jobs in the region. The Partnership states that fields driving both the state and regional economy within the context of a global economic marketplace are computer sciences; engineering; life sciences; medical research; nursing; and secondary teachers in math, science, English as a Second Language, and special education—should be the focus of increased degree production. The Prosperity Partnership estimates that almost half of the job openings in Washington between 2007 and 2012 will occur in these fields. In addition, associate degree production in the fields of medical diagnosing and treating, and health technologists and technicians is cited. These findings are consistent with the findings of the SIS survey and interview of the region's employers, students, and counselors.

Net Migration of Highly Educated Workers

Washington is regarded as having one of the most highly educated populations in the country when this measure is calculated by the number of baccalaureate degree holders as a percentage of total population. However, Washington ranks in the bottom quartile in terms of production of bachelor's degrees. This disparity is explained by the net in-migration of highly educated workers who earned their degrees elsewhere. Between 1990 and 2000, Washington imported roughly 74,000 people who held a bachelor's degree or higher. This in-migration is credited for mitigating the higher education system's shortfall in baccalaureate degree production, especially in high-demand fields. Of the top fifteen occupations in terms of total net in-migration, seven are occupations in which more than half the workers coming to the state hold at least a bachelor's degree[1].

Statewide Capacity for Growth at the Baccalaureate Level and Above

It is not possible to add enough additional enrollment capacity to existing institutions in the study region to respond to growth associated with either population increases or increased higher education participation without substantial investment and alternative delivery approaches. On a statewide basis, our existing public baccalaureate institutions serve approximately 89,000 students. Adding an additional 25,000 students to meet the HECB estimate of demand for degrees in 2015 would require growing all the public baccalaureate institutions, including branch campuses, to their growth limit. The resulting distribution of available enrollment options is not ideally situated to respond to increasing student and employer demand in the regions of the state experiencing the fastest growth.

[1] These occupations include: Computer Specialists, Health Diagnosing and Treating Practitioners, "Other" Managers, Business Operations Specialists, Operations Specialists Managers, Engineers, and Information and Records Clerks.

Table 1: Statewide Enrollment Benchmarks and Capacity Limit[2]

Benchmark	**2015-2016 FTE Enrollment Level (public four-year)**
OFM Estimate (Current Participation)	100,966
HECB Estimate (Demand for Degrees)	115,973
HECB Estimate based on Global Challenge State Median Degree Production	123,657
Capacity Limit of Existing Public Baccalaureate Institutions	117,249

Needs Analysis

The consultant's report takes a step beyond this statewide analysis of need to look at the impact of a set of alternative policy goals for the SIS region. Five policy options are described in the report.

The option selected by the HECB project team, in consultation with the Local Advisory Committee and the Project Coordination Team, would move the region to *state average participation rates at the upper-division and graduate levels by 2015, and to the national average by 2025*. Lower-division is projected at current participation rates, since lower-division participation in Washington is higher than the national average. The assumption is that lower-division will continue to participate as it has in the past.

In order to make the estimates provided in the report, enrollments are broken down into three levels:

- **Lower-division**: In all estimates, the lower-division FTEs are estimated based on maintaining the current level of service (i.e., current participation rate) to a rapidly-growing region.
- **Upper-division** estimates include a component to address population growth, and an additional component based on the policy option described above.
- **Graduate level** estimates are made in the same fashion as upper-division.

"Maintaining the current level of service" means the same participation rate as currently exists, while also responding to the increasing demand based on population growth. This is similar to the approach used by the Office of Financial Management to assess future enrollment demand at the state level. The "unmet need" takes the total of these estimates and subtracts the portion of need that the key institutions serving the region could add during the planning horizon.

[2] HECB assessment of FTE required to meet Benchmark Degree Production.

Staff Comments on Methodology

The methodology employed by the consultants, similar to that used in previous studies, was reviewed with the members of the Project Coordination Team, the Office of Financial Management, and Senate and House higher education budget staff. While there are limitations on some source data, these are constraints that all researchers face with the state projections. We support the methodology used for this study.

Student, Employer, and Community Demand for Programs

The HECB project directors were active participants in the interview and town hall meeting process. They led seven town hall meetings and numerous focus groups, participated in the employer and student surveys and interviews several times, and received feedback on the type of classes and majors desired within the region. With the exception of a few very specific majors that would be beyond the scope of any institution other than a major research university, those participating in meetings, surveys and interviews consistently expressed a need for baccalaureate-level majors in:

- Business, accounting, and finance
- Computer science and network systems
- Engineering and engineering technology – all disciplines
- Nursing and allied health and medical professions
- Education (teaching), special education, middle and high school
- Project and operations management and planning
- Hospitality (Skagit)

As mentioned earlier, Washington is a net importer of people with bachelor's degrees, one of only 14 states with a net in-migration of bachelor's degrees or higher. The state ranks fifth in the number of net in-migrating workers in the country. Washington Learns finds that "[w]e have been importing educated workers from other states and nations to fill the highest paying jobs, leaving less stable and lower paying jobs for people educated in Washington." Employers in high demand job areas such as engineering, technology, health care, and in skilled trades such as construction report difficulties with recruiting in state. In addition to similar findings in the SIS study, The Prosperity Partnership, Technology Alliance, and Washington Roundtable reports have identified high demand degree production as a top priority or key element to achieving a more robust state economy. "To be competitive in the global economy, we must educate more people to achieve at higher levels."[3]

The State and Regional Needs Assessment finds that "[t]he higher education system must increase the number of graduates with the skills required to meet the employer needs in a number of key occupational areas." Positions in the high-demand areas of computer science, engineering, software engineering and architecture, and health care occupations as well as an increase in the number of students enrolled in graduate and professional programs to meet employer needs are needed. A further finding from the assessment is a need for increased access

[3] *Washington Learns draft report for October 9, 2006 Steering Committee Discussion*

to degree programs in business, education, life and physical sciences, and social sciences are also identified. This is consistent with findings in the SIS study.

Approximately 19% of Washington high school graduates attend college out of state. While reasons vary, a portion of these students cannot access higher education opportunities in their desired majors in the state. It should be noted that existing studies regarding student demand in the state do not take into account out-of-state enrollments or discouraged students who fail to apply.

Staff comment on duplication of services

During the comment period a question was raised regarding the possible duplication of services among a proposed new institution and existing institutions. While the final impact cannot be predicted with a high degree of certainty, we agree it is important to focus on a prioritization and coordination of majors to avoid unnecessary duplication within the study area but also to ensure efficiency in achieving degree production goals.

The Polytechnic

The need for a polytechnic focus in addition to providing access to liberal arts programs in the region came from the needs analysis, as well as ongoing feedback from members of the Local Advisory Committee and the public comment at town hall meetings.

During conversations with the public and members of the committee, it became clear that there were many ideas of the definition of a polytechnic. The project team's working definition is "an institution of higher education specializing in the teaching of the applied sciences."

Staff comment on the concept of polytechnic

There are only a handful of pure polytechnic universities in the United States that draw students from the state of Washington. We believe that Cal Poly-Pomona, which serves approximately 60 percent of its student body from the surrounding community, offers the best model to emulate for the region and state, but there are other examples nationwide from which to learn. These institutions have done considerable study on redefining their roles in the midst of increasing complexity of the world along with the expanding impact of science and technology on society and values.

The concept of polytechnic merits further study and definition. However, any decision about a new type of institution should occur with the context of the state's overall higher education system, since changes to any one component of the system will have impacts and implications for the entire system.

State economic and workforce training goals as well as public expectations set an ambitious agenda for higher education for which sufficient funding has yet to materialize. Building a strong economy requires a long term funding commitment because results are not immediate. Higher education competes for available funding with state mandated services including correctional facilities, Medicaid, and the K-12 education system. Support for an additional

institution in a highly competitive environment amid persistent funding imbalances is clearly unlikely without a common goal or frame of reference for all institutions.

Technology in the Classroom

The consultant's draft final report calls for "development/expansion of programs to respond to the geographic and cultural diversity of the region, including elements of local center, distance learning, and other modes of service delivery." This element needs to be investigated further for solution refinement. However, a change in service delivery does not come without cost; implementing technology-based solutions is not as inexpensive as some people assume. Students will need to have the same basic foundation available that they would have on campus: an extensive library, writing labs, math labs, learning support, and well-trained faculty members. Several four-year public baccalaureate institutions have created successful distance learning programs that could be used as a model for hybrid delivery of courses.

Staff comment on technology

We are living during a time of rapid technological and communication changes when a fax machine is nearly outmoded and e-mail is described by students as being for "old people."[4] There are varying views of the use of technology: as a communication tool to reach larger number of students, as a convenience tool for students who cannot travel due to time or distance constraints, as a cost saving measure as a way to serve large numbers of students without increasing faculties or building classrooms, or as a time-saving convenience. Strategic use of technology has the potential to strengthen a university's ability to serve its students. Although a detailed analysis of the use of technology is beyond the scope of this initial study, the topic is an important one to integrate further into both course and facility design in future activities of all institutions.

In addition to distance learning programs already used in Washington's higher education system, nationwide more than 80 percent of American colleges offer online-learning options, including MIT, Stanford and with notable successes at the University of Illinois at Springfield and the University of Central Florida. We have much to learn from other institutions that have made a commitment to a technological shift. A wide variety of options are available. While some campuses are experimenting with iPods and lectures available on digital layers, Virginia Tech has developed a Math Emporium, with 500 workstations that allow students and faculty members to blend technology and personal interaction.[5]

Technology is expected to play a major role in meeting the higher education needs of the region as it continues to alter almost every aspect of higher education, from libraries to teaching to student life.[6] We expect that the strategic use of technology will not only heighten the learning experience, but make access more readily available for potential students, particularly those in the 35 to 55 year old age bracket. Increased use of technology will require careful design and investment in physical structure both for existing facilities and those planned for the future.

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[4] The Chronicle of Higher Education, Information Technology, from the issue dated October 6, 2006, http://chronicle.com/free/v53/i07/07a02701.htm

[5] The Chronicle of Higher Education, http://chronicle.com/weekly/v52/i16/16b00801.htm

[6] The Chronicle of Higher Education, http://chronicle.com/weekly/v52/i16/16b00101.htm

It also has implications for personal learning interaction and methods of teaching, which may require new thinking about how courses are offered, faculty training and changing from a one-way presentation format. Distance learning or hybrid models hold promise for improving conversation, debate, and presentations. As a result of intensive reading and writing, students improve skills through practice. In addition, the lives of students—both within the traditional college age range and working professionals—demand the convenience and mobility that distance learning provides.

A campus component to higher education helps students bond with each other and with the institution. We do not mean to suggest that all physical classrooms be replaced by technology or that technology is a panacea for lowering costs or for accommodating more students. However, when used in concert with more efficient use of existing facilities and course design, it becomes one way to increase access for larger numbers of students.

Building a hybrid model that includes some campus attendance along with intensive online course delivery requires more planning and creative course design. The extent to which campus attendance or online delivery can be used will depend on the level and nature of the courses. For example, corporations use a blended approach for managerial and executive training. Similarly, some higher education institutions have found that advanced degrees that include significant discussion and collaboration (group work) benefit from short stretches of campus attendance.

Options Considered to Meet Demand

The following eight options were considered as potential scenarios to meet the long-term needs of the region:

1. Four-Year Regional (own board)
2. Four-Year Polytechnic (own board)
3. Four-Year System Regional
4. Four-Year System Polytechnic
5. Upper-Division and Grad Branch Campus
6. Upper-Division and Grad (own board)
7. University Center Model
8. Community College to Four-Year

Staff Comment on Options and Locale

Staff acknowledges the varied success of some of the options elsewhere in the state and in particular the successful operation of the university center model in several locations, but agree with the consultant that it is not the right model for meeting the long-term higher education needs of the region. We also agree that the Everett/Marysville area within the Urban Growth Boundary is the appropriate location to serve the largest concentration of traditional college-age students between 17 and 24, as well as placebound adults who are seeking to complete a bachelor's or master's degree.

Criteria to Address Options

Criteria for evaluating alternatives are discussed in detail in the consultants' final report. The criteria include: 1) programmatically responsive; 2) accomplishes participation rate and degree award goals; 3) meets local and state education and cultural needs; 4) meets local and state education and economic needs; 5) high quality instructional support and student services; 6) continuity and predictability; 7) clear institutional presence and perceived quality and reputability; 8) flexibility and adaptability; 9) builds on existing area programs; 10) convenient format and times provided to students; and 11) time to implement.

Staff comment on cost as a criterion

Cost was not selected as a criterion for evaluating alternatives in an attempt to focus on meeting regional needs to increase participation rates first. While authorizing legislation requires the study to assess higher education needs in the study area and "identify costs and a process for completing a master plan for higher education expansion," it does not direct the HECB to adopt a least cost alternative.

The approach of the study has been to identify the best alternative to meet the needs of the region and respond to statewide needs as well and to consider an approach that would be prudent, efficient and cost effective. Cost estimates were developed for the top four of the eight alternatives. These estimates include the cost of improvements in the community and technical college system.

In the interest of minimizing the amount of time for delivery of a high quality education at a reasonable cost, a phased approach to development and affiliation with an existing institution are recommended. The cost analysis has employed the current state reimbursement rate for a regional institution rather than assume a higher FTE reimbursement prior to legislative action.

Local Advisory Committee Recommended Option

The Local Advisory Committee voted on a preferred alterative: an unaffiliated four-year polytechnic. Individual members' reasons varied; some felt that a new public baccalaureate would be more responsive to local and regional needs, while others agreed with the consultants' assessment that expansion of current programs and methods of teaching might not be the most responsive way to move technological higher education into the 21st century. In addition, the consultants and some members of the Local Advisory Committee expressed that a branch campus or system campus might not be able to compete with the needs or priorities of the main campus.

Consultant Recommendation

While the Local Advisory Committee endorsed investment in a new independent four-year residential university with an economic development-driven polytechnic focus, the consultant teams recommend concentration on the target of significant unmet need, with continued planning efforts to determine the exact governance structure, e.g., independent vs. affiliation with an existing institution.

The consultants' specific recommendations are:

- Investment in a new four-year university with a polytechnic focus, located between North Everett and Marysville to minimize travel distances and times for a majority of students, faculty, and staff.
- Continued investment/development of the University of Washington's commuter campus in Bothell. Buildout at 6,000 students is part of the solution to meet the higher education needs for both King County and parts of the SIS area.
- Continued investment in each of the area's community colleges, including expansion of lower-division polytechnic opportunities, workforce training, and adult basic education at the area's community colleges.
- Development and expansion of programs to respond to the geographic and cultural diversity of the region, including elements of local centers, distance learning, and other modes of service delivery.

Staff Comments on Affiliated vs. Unaffiliated

We believe that perceived shortcomings with affiliation may be overcome and that should a polytechnic university be selected in the future, there are benefits from affiliation with an existing public baccalaureate institution. These benefits include a quicker start-up time, an easier accreditation process, and the appeal of "branding" that comes with the excellent reputations that both the research universities and the regional universities possess. Past success, innovative and visionary leadership, and an interest in establishing a new polytechnic which will operate in a manner consistent with a global economy focus necessary for success in the 21st century will dictate which schools may be interested in affiliation. Leadership and a faculty with a different focus, training, and interest will be important for any new institution.

Staff Comment on Everett University Center

The consultants' recommendation includes a proposal to operate the Everett University Center in cooperation with Skagit Valley College that will itself provide a "Higher Education Learning Center." We agree that the Everett University Center, described in detail in the report submitted to the Legislature in response to ESSHB 1794, is an important resource in meeting immediate and mid- term higher education needs in the SIS the region.

As part of a potential future solution involving a new institution located in the Everett/Marysville area, moving the location of the university center to Skagit Valley College in Mount Vernon, where it would be more accessible to north Snohomish and north Island County residents, is a viable option. Vacated space on the Everett Community College campus would be absorbed by the expected continued growth of FTEs. That expected growth, along with growth in the other area community colleges, should be encouraged and funded. It is necessary to meet the needs of the region based on population growth.